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TAGS: [CASC](#) [PTER](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [IS](#) [GZ](#) [WE](#)

SUBJECT: TRAVEL WARNING - ISRAEL, THE WEST BANK, AND
GAZA

1. This Travel Warning updates U.S. citizens on the risks of traveling to Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, and about threats to themselves and to U.S. interests in those locations. The Department of State urges U.S. citizens to remain mindful of security factors when planning travel to Israel and the West Bank. In addition, the Department of State urges U.S. citizens to avoid all travel to the Gaza Strip. This warning replaces the Travel Warning issued September 26, 2008 to update information on the general security environment in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

The Gaza Strip and Southern Israel

2. The State Department strongly urges that American citizens refrain from all travel to the Gaza Strip. This recommendation has been in effect since the deadly roadside bombing of a U.S. Embassy convoy in Gaza in October 2003. It applies to all Americans, including journalists and aid workers. American citizens should be aware that as a consequence of a longstanding prohibition on travel by U.S. Government employees into the Gaza Strip, the ability of consular staff to offer timely assistance to U.S. citizens there is extremely limited.

3. The Department of State warns U.S. citizens that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has been engaged in a military operation, "Operation Cast Lead," in the Gaza Strip. This operation began on December 27, 2008, with aerial and naval strikes and expanded on January 3, 2009, to include ground operations. The IDF strictly controls travel within the area of the crossing points between Israel and the Gaza Strip, and has essentially sealed the border. The security environment within Gaza and along its borders, including its border with Egypt

and its seacoast, is dangerous and can change at any time.

¶4. Since the December 19, 2008, expiration of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, a State Department designated foreign terrorist organization, Hamas has launched ongoing rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza into southern Israel. Some rockets have travelled more than 40 km and landed as far north as Yavne and Gadera and as far east as Beersheva. As a result of IDF military operations in Gaza and the high-volume of rocket and mortar attacks into Israel from Gaza, U.S. Government personnel have been restricted from traveling within 30 km of the Gaza Strip. For U.S. Government employees to travel inside the 30 KM radius, approval is required from the Embassy's Regional Security Office.

¶5. The Government of Israel's Home Front Command has ordered residents of all communities within 40 kilometers of the Gaza Strip, including Beersheva, Yavne, and Gadera, to take precautions against rocket attacks. Schools and public facilities may be closed and the provision of some public services scaled back in areas considered to be within rocket range. American citizens within rocket range should take appropriate precautions and security measures, which may include remaining within a certain distance of a sheltered space and staying in that space for five minutes after a rocket alert sounds. Specific guidance in English is available at the Home Front Command Web site: <http://www.oref.org.il/934-en/PAKAR.aspx>.

The West Bank

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¶6. The security environment in the West Bank remains volatile. Demonstrations are unpredictable and can occur without warning and become violent. Vehicles have also been the target of rocks, Molotov cocktails, and gunfire on West Bank roads. The Department of State urges Americans to defer travel to the West Bank at this time.

¶7. The IDF continues to carry out security operations in the West Bank. Israeli security operations can occur at any time, including raids to arrest terrorist suspects that lead to disturbances and violence. Americans can be caught in the middle of potentially dangerous situations. Some Americans involved in demonstrations and other such activities in the West Bank have become involved in confrontations with Israeli settlers and the IDF. The State Department recommends that Americans, for their own safety, avoid demonstrations.

¶8. All those who pass through the West Bank should exercise particular care when approaching and transiting Israeli military checkpoints. Travelers should be aware that they might encounter delays and difficulties, and might even be denied passage through a checkpoint. American citizens should be aware that the ability of consular staff to offer timely assistance to U.S. citizens in the West Bank is limited.

Travel Restrictions for U.S. Government Personnel

¶9. All American U.S. Government personnel and their dependents are prohibited from traveling to any cities, towns, or settlements in the West Bank, except when they are on mission-essential business or are traveling for other mission-approved purposes. For limited, personal

travel, U.S. government personnel and family members are permitted to travel through the West Bank only by using routes 1 and 90 to reach the Allenby/King Hussein Bridge or the Dead Sea coast near Ein Gedi and Masada. They are also permitted to travel north on Route 90 from the Allenby/King Hussein Bridge to the Sea of Galilee. Use of these routes is only approved for transit purposes, with stops permitted at only Qumran National Park off Route 90 by the Dead Sea. Each transit requires prior notification to the Consulate General's security office. U.S. Government personnel and family members are permitted both official and personal travel on Route 443 between Modi'in and Jerusalem without prior notification, during daylight hours only.

General Safety and Security

¶10. Israeli authorities remain concerned about the continuing threat of terrorist attacks. Two fatal bulldozer attacks on civilians in July 2008 and a March 2008 shooting, all in Jerusalem, and a February 2008 bombing in Dimona are reminders of the ongoing precariousness of the security environment.

¶11. Given the military conflict in and around Gaza, the IDF has placed its forces along the northern border with Lebanon on a heightened state of alert. In early January 2009, short-range rockets were fired from Lebanon into northern Israel, reportedly a demonstration of support by militants for Hamas' resistance to Israel in the Gaza Strip. Due to this northern rocket fire, U.S. Government employees have been advised to avoid traveling north of Akko/Acre and along the entire border with Lebanon during the IDF operation in Gaza. If Americans are present in this area, they should monitor media reports and take appropriate security measures in

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accordance with the Home Front Command's guidance (<http://www.oref.org.il/934-en/PAKAR.aspx>).

¶12. American citizens are cautioned that a greater danger may exist around restaurants, businesses, and other places associated with U.S. interests and/or located near U.S. official buildings, such as the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv and the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem. American citizens are also urged to exercise a high degree of caution and to use common sense when patronizing restaurants, nightclubs, cafes, malls, places of worship, and theaters, especially during peak hours. Large crowds and public gatherings have been targeted by terrorists in the past and should be avoided to the extent practicable. American citizens should take into consideration that public buses, trains, and their respective terminals are "off-limits" to U.S. Government personnel. Authorized and spontaneous demonstrations related to the IDF action in Gaza have taken place in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, around Afula and elsewhere in Israel. U.S. Government personnel have been directed to avoid all protests. Personnel have also been urged to maintain a high level of vigilance and situational awareness at all times.

¶13. The State Department urges American citizens to remain vigilant while traveling throughout Jerusalem, especially within the commercial and downtown areas of West Jerusalem and the city center. Spontaneous or planned protests within the Old City are possible, especially after Friday prayers. Some of these protests have led to violent clashes. The Old City of Jerusalem is off-limits to U.S. Government personnel and their family members after dark during the entire week and between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Fridays.

Entry/Exit Difficulties

¶14. The Government of Israel considers American citizens who also hold Israeli citizenship or have a claim to such dual nationality to be Israeli citizens for immigration and other legal purposes. For example, an American citizen child of an Israeli parent will be considered an Israeli citizen by Israeli immigration officials and Israeli law will apply to the child's travel to, and departure from, Israel.

¶15. American citizens whom Israeli authorities suspect of being of Arab or Muslim origin are likely to face additional, often time-consuming, and probing questioning by immigration and border authorities, or may even be denied entry into Israel. If they are determined by Israeli authorities to have a claim to residency status in the West Bank or Gaza, or to have a claim to a Palestinian identification number, such American citizens may be required by the Government of Israel to use a Palestinian Authority travel document to transit Israel to enter the West Bank or Gaza. Such a determination could be made for American citizens if they or their immediate family members or grandparents were born in the West Bank or Gaza, currently reside there, or lived there for any appreciable amount of time.

¶16. American citizens who hold a Palestinian Authority ID, as well as persons judged by the Israeli authorities to have claim to a Palestinian Authority ID, will be considered subject to Israeli law and to regulations that Israel applies to residents of the West Bank and Gaza, regardless of the fact that they hold U.S. citizenship. A Palestinian ID number might be active or inactive. If active, the Government of Israel may stamp the Palestinian Identification Number in the U.S. passport, and the American citizen may be required to obtain Palestinian Authority travel documents prior to departing Israel. In addition, American citizens having

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or eligible for a Palestinian Authority ID who entered Israel via Ben Gurion Airport might be required to depart via the Allenby Bridge to Jordan. Upon arrival, such persons may wish to consider asking Israeli immigration authorities from where they will be required to depart. Additionally, American citizens who have (or who are eligible to receive) a Palestinian Authority Identification Number, are likely to be refused entry to Israel via Ben Gurion Airport and told that they must enter Israel from Jordan via the Allenby (also known as King Hussein) Bridge.

¶17. The United States Government seeks equal treatment for all American citizens regardless of national origin or ethnicity. American citizens who encounter difficulties are encouraged to contact the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv or the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem at the telephone numbers below.

¶18. Americans in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip are strongly encouraged to register with the Consular Sections of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv or the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem through the State Department's travel registration website, <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. U.S. citizens who require emergency services may telephone the Consulate General in Jerusalem at (972) (2) 628-7137, after hours (for emergencies): (972) (2) 622-7250, or the Embassy in Tel Aviv at (972) (3) 519-7575, after hours (for emergencies): (972) (3) 519-7551.

¶19. Current information on travel and security in

Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip may be obtained from the Department of State by calling 1-888-407-4747 within the United States and Canada, or, from overseas, 1-202-501-4444. For additional and more in-depth information about specific aspects of travel to these areas, U.S. citizens should consult: the Country Specific Information for Israel, the West Bank and Gaza; and the Worldwide Caution. These along with other Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts and Country Specific Information sheets are available on the Department's Internet website at <http://travel.state.gov>. Up-to-date information on security conditions can also be accessed at <http://usembassy-israel.org.il> or <http://jerusalem.usconsulate.gov>. Additionally, Americans are encouraged to sign up to receive security-related information from the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv via email at the following link: <http://telaviv.usembassy.gov/consular/acs/index.aspx>.

¶20. Minimize considered.
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